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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4946  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHMEP/THE MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7295  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5788  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3012  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0659  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6022  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0172  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8047  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7457  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000028

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN GROUPS PROTEST ISRAELI OFFENSIVE IN THE  
GAZA STRIP

REF: NEW DELHI 03248

Classified By: POLCOUNS Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Gaza strikes are emerging as a significant issue for some Muslim groups in India, who are raking up traditional anti-Israel rhetoric. Urdu media has been portraying the U.S. and Israel as enemies of Islam, stoking Muslim anger further and radical Islamic groups are gearing up for rallies and demonstrations which may draw larger crowds in the coming days and weeks. However, the ongoing Indo-Pak crisis along with the government's official condemnation of Israeli action has helped prevent the fire from spreading to the common Indian citizen. Indian politicians will likely join the chorus against the U.S. and Israel in the coming days as political parties try to gain the favor of Muslim voters in the approaching parliamentary elections. Despite the protests and rhetoric, the Government of India is unlikely to interrupt its long relationship with Israel. End Summary.

Muslims throughout India Protest Israeli Operation  
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¶2. (U) Israel's incursion into Gaza has received broad media coverage in India, and with it has come the expected protests of Muslim and Left groups. Most of the protests that have sprouted in certain parts of the country are minor and confined to urban centers. Protests in Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow and adjoining districts in particular have had a small turnout, and there have been a few minor protests organized by pro-Iran elements in the Shia clergy during the last week, according to Zaheer Mustafa, editor of Lucknow Urdu daily. In Delhi, members of the Coordination Committee for Indian Muslims together with students from three Delhi universities gathered near India's Parliament building on 7 January to protest and called for the suspension of diplomatic ties with Israel. The ruling Left Front in West Bengal is planning protest marches across the state on 10 January, according to The Hindu newspaper, and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), an ally of the ruling Congress Party, also urged for the severing of all ties with Israel.

13. (U) In Hyderabad, approximately 500 protestors, led by a minority group from the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee, staged a demonstration near the U.S. Consulate on 2 January protesting Israel's air strikes in the Gaza Strip. The protest was peaceful for the most part: they staged a mini sit-in to block traffic, and there were also reports that several protesters jumped onto the hoods of nearby cars and burnt an unidentified effigy. A six-person delegation from the protesters was allowed to meet with consulate officials and present a letter denouncing Israel's actions. Following the demonstration at the U.S. Consulate, protestors moved to Chief Minister's residence for a similar demonstration. That same day, at least 50 people were injured when police in Kashmir fired teargas shells on 2 January to disperse hundreds of Muslims protesting Israeli strikes on Gaza, said police and witnesses interviewed by Reuters.

#### Delhi Unlikely to Respond to Protestors' Demands

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14. (C) The Ministry of External Affairs has issued two statements since Israel began Operation Cast Lead, urging "an immediate end to military action by all concerned" and supporting "all efforts aimed at securing an immediate ceasefire." According to Professor of West Asian Studies P.R. Kumaraswamy of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), these statements are for (Muslim) public consumption, and beyond making similar statements in the future, the Indian Government is unlikely to take any other steps to show its disapproval of Israel's actions. "In spite of all the noise,

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India rarely takes an extremist stance," said Kumaraswamy, explaining that the Government of India would be extremely careful in reproaching Israel. "Once you take a position, it is very difficult to go back," he said referring to India's diplomatic relations with Israel, which he noted have been friendly since normalization in 1991.

15. (C) Israeli DCM Belotsercovsky told PolOff that regarding the second statement MEA released condemning Israeli actions on 4 January, Delhi was simply "going through the motions." Although there is a lot of concern about the humanitarian cause in the Gaza Strip, and therefore cannot keep silent, he said, the Israeli Embassy in Delhi assesses that the Indian Government understands Israel's position.

16. (U) Zafar Agha, a freelance journalist and political commentator said he does not see any implications of these protests for the ruling Congress Party as the Government of India has been consistently critical of Israel's role, assuaging Indian Muslim sentiments. Qari Mian Mazhari, Editor of the "Secular Qayadat" daily echoed Agha's view, adding that the Indian Government's open condemnation of the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip has been sufficient in assuaging Muslim feelings.

17. (C) Kumaraswamy speculated that if Delhi felt pressured enough to take a stronger stance, it would perhaps postpone any official Israeli government delegations scheduled this month or issue harsher statements against Israel at the Durban Conference Against Racism in April 2009.

#### Real Focus on Indo-Pak, not Israel

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18. (C) Muslim activists may be holding back due to the current preoccupation with Indo-Pak issues. According to Mazhari the average Muslim does not think of the Middle East conflict as a priority concern, rather focusing on more relevant day-to-day livelihood issues. And when it comes to foreign policy, the country that takes the limelight is usually\*and especially now\*Pakistan.

#### Larger Protests and Rallies Anticipated in Short Term

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¶9. (SBU) Although Post's contacts did not seem overly concerned with the ongoing anti-Israel protests, some anticipated the possibility that larger protests and harsher statements would be witnessed in the coming days. Mr. Arshad Faridi, Senior Correspondent of Dainak Jagaran, a widely circulated Hindi daily, said that Thursday, 8 January, is the Muslim "Day of Ashura," a day during which Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn bin Ali, the grandson of the Islamic prophet Mohammad, and Friday is the main prayer day for Muslims. Agha also considered the possibility that protests would snowball into large rallies as a result of the Wahabi campaign to stoke rage in the community, but mentioned that Muslim anger would significantly decrease if a ceasefire was declared in the next week.

#### India to Maintain Healthy Relations with Israel

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¶10. (C) Comment: As with most crises involving Israel or the Middle East Peace Process, the Congress Party government will take measures to placate its important Muslim constituency and, with general elections approaching, we can expect the public rhetoric to be strongly negative regarding Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip. However, particularly in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, where India finds an experienced ally in the war on terror in Israel, Delhi will not likely jeopardize its healthy relationship with Tel Aviv. Demands by the Left and by some Muslim groups to cut ties

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with Israel, while gaining public attention, should not have an effect on India's foreign policy toward Israel. End Comment.  
MULFORD